

Thanet Archaeological Landscapes Mapping Project



Project Newsletter No.2 - March 2024

Issue two of the Thanet Archaeological Landscape Mapping project newsletter

Welcome to the second in the series of newsletters on the Thanet Archaeological Landscape Mapping project where we provide an update on the project's progress, details about the key steps and information about how you can get involved. The first issue covered the reasons why we are carrying out the work, as well as a general summary of our aims and objectives. If you missed it, earlier newsletters are available on the project page of the Kent County Council Website

<https://www.kent.gov.uk/leisure-and-community/history-and-heritage/thanet-archaeological-landscape-mapping-project>

The data enhancement work

A key element of the project is the enhancement of the information held in the Kent Historic Environment Record (HER) and its associated GIS, so that it can be used more effectively to develop an Archaeological Characterisation and an Archaeological Strategy for Thanet. This work is now well underway. We have greatly enhanced the depiction of major projects such as the East Kent Access Road and Thanet Earth excavations in the HER and are now adding additional information for south Thanet (the area of Thanet we are addressing first).

Many of these reports provide detail about interesting, multi-phased archaeological sites, and the larger sites in particular will be very useful in understanding the wider archaeological landscape. There is not room here to delve into the detail of the many thousands of interesting features and finds that have been included in the data work so far, but some of the highlights from the largest excavations are summarised below.

Thanet Earth

The Thanet Earth excavations were carried out between 2007 and 2008. Located between Birchington and Monkton, they were used in this project as a test for the data processing approach that we are following. The site was exceptional in its scale as it encompassed an area of some 47 hectares - the biggest excavation ever carried out by the Canterbury Archaeological Trust. About 1500 feature groups were uncovered representing all periods from the Neolithic to the Post Medieval. The scale of the project allowed roughly 6000 years of the landscape use and development to be recorded – a rare opportunity.



Above: Bronze Age Barrow uncovered at Thanet Earth site
Right: Bronze Age Burial with grave goods. Images from CAT



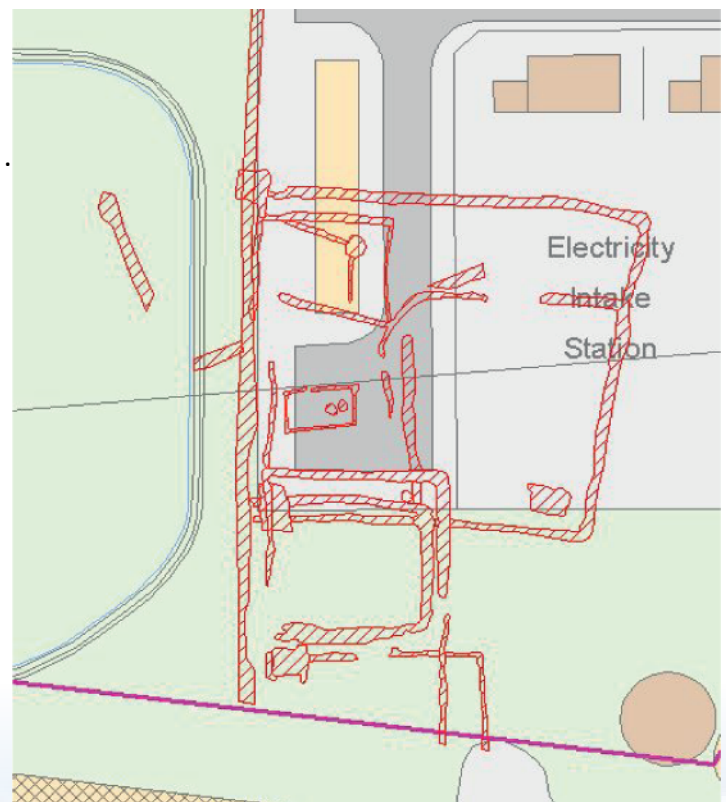
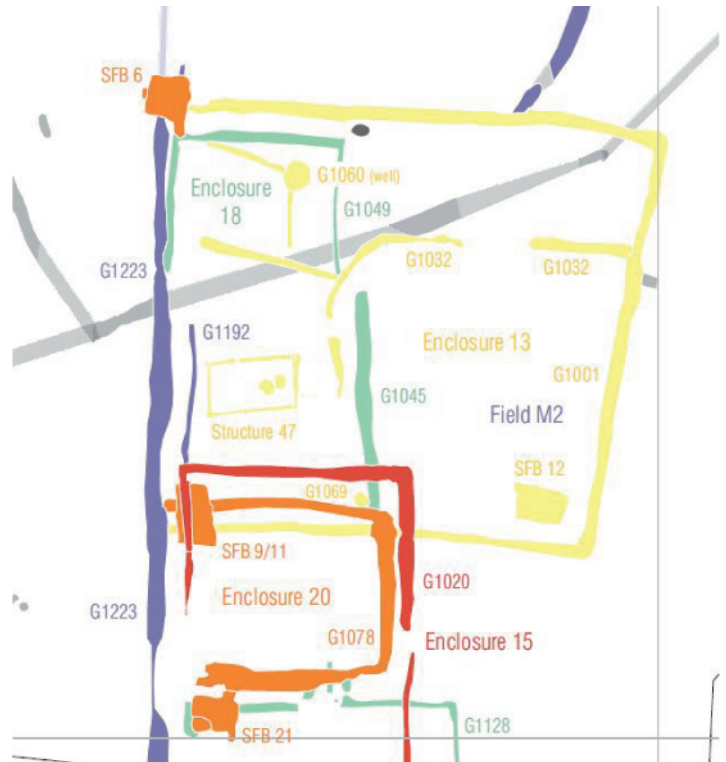


Medieval site at Thanet Earth under excavation

Discoveries of particular interest include a group of pits which represent some of the earliest Neolithic features identified in Kent, with radio-carbon dates of 3994-3625 cal BC. One of these pits also produced the earliest known evidence in the UK for a variety of free-threshing wheat. It has been suggested that this evidence points to Thanet having been part of the entry route of Neolithic farming into Britain from the Continent. The early Bronze Age was also well represented at this site which produced the largest number of beaker period burials (c.2300-1800 BC) from any single project in Kent (17 in total). These were often (though not always) associated with round barrows and one remarkably well preserved double-ditched example had the burial and its associated grave goods undisturbed in a central grave (ring ditches and burial pictured overleaf). It was Medieval features and finds that dominate the archaeological record for this site, however, and represent an agricultural landscape with a long period of continual use. Over 50 Medieval enclosures were recorded, nearly all of which were associated with structures, mostly of sunken-featured form. This represents a unique concentration of these buildings in the Medieval landscape of Kent, as it is currently understood.

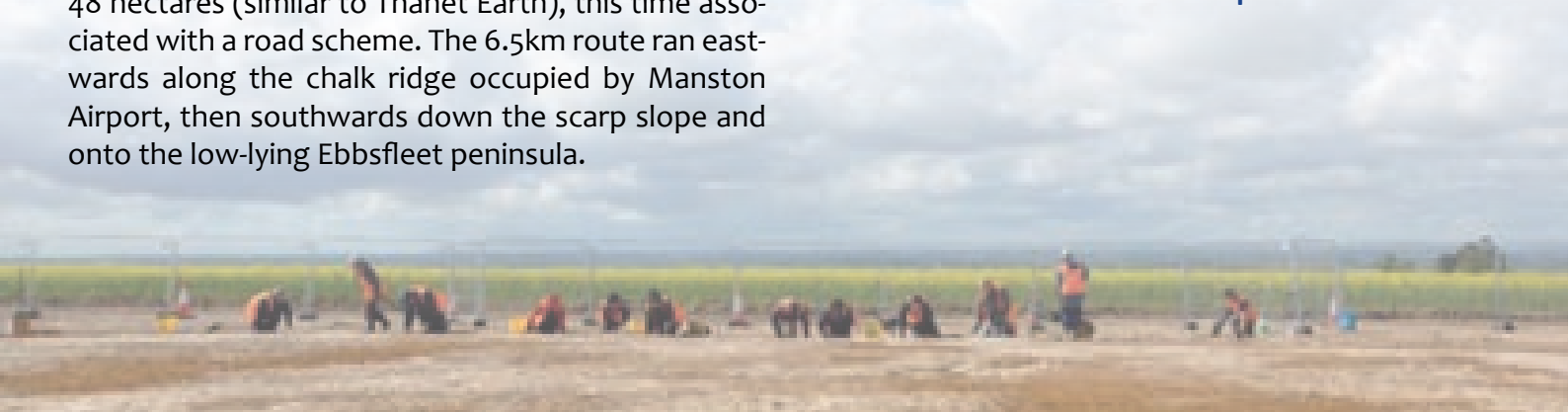
East Kent Access Road

This was another very large investigation. It covered 48 hectares (similar to Thanet Earth), this time associated with a road scheme. The 6.5km route ran eastwards along the chalk ridge occupied by Manston Airport, then southwards down the scarp slope and onto the low-lying Ebbsfleet peninsula.



Top: Medieval site as illustrated in CAT publication

Bottom: Medieval site as now depicted in the HER





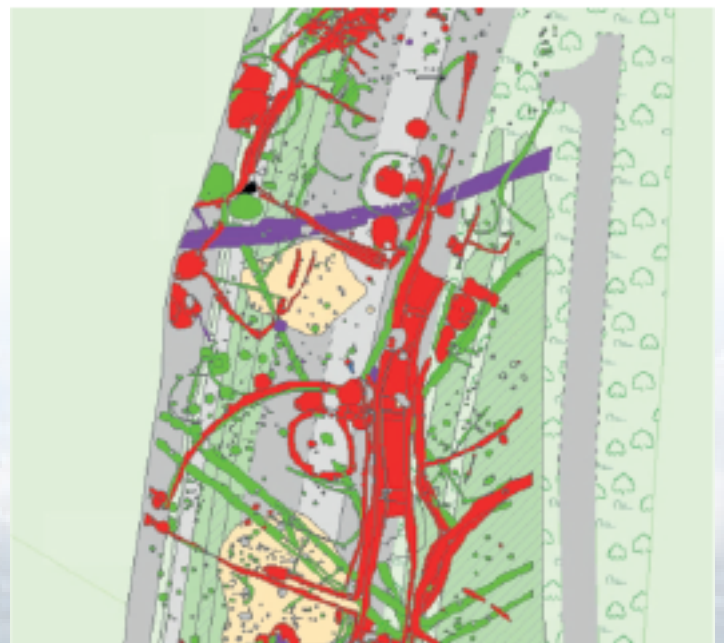
East Kent Access route during archaeological investigations

The excavated areas were not very wide and it is likely that many of the features continue into the surrounding fields. These investigations therefore provided a valuable window into the archaeological landscape of a very large area.

Many thousands of finds and features were discovered, spanning the Palaeolithic period to the Second World War. Some of the highlights include evidence for the large-scale organisation and permanent settlement of the landscape during the later Bronze Age. Such evidence had been largely absent from Thanet before this project. The evidence came in the form of an extensive Late Bronze Age coaxial field system along with trackways and enclosures. The small finds were also noteworthy and included a pair of fine penannular gold bracelets and a small hoard of bronze objects including 17 fragments of ingots and broken bronze objects. Both these groups of finds were discovered on the Ebbsfleet peninsula and are amongst a cluster of at least seven hoards now known from this low-lying and seasonally flooded area, perhaps an indication that the peninsula may have had a special role in this trade or a ritual significance.

**Archaeological features
from the East Kent Access route
as now depicted in the HER**

The Ebbsfleet peninsula was also the location of part of a large, ditched enclosure. Radiocarbon dating suggests that the ditch was probably constructed in the 1st century BC and there are similarities between it and the Roman outer siege defences built by Julius Caesar in 52 BC at Alésia in Gaul (modern France), and other contemporary Roman examples. The ditch has, therefore, been tentatively interpreted as being associated with Julius Caesar's military campaigns to Britain in 55 and 54 BC. If true, this would be a discovery of national significance!



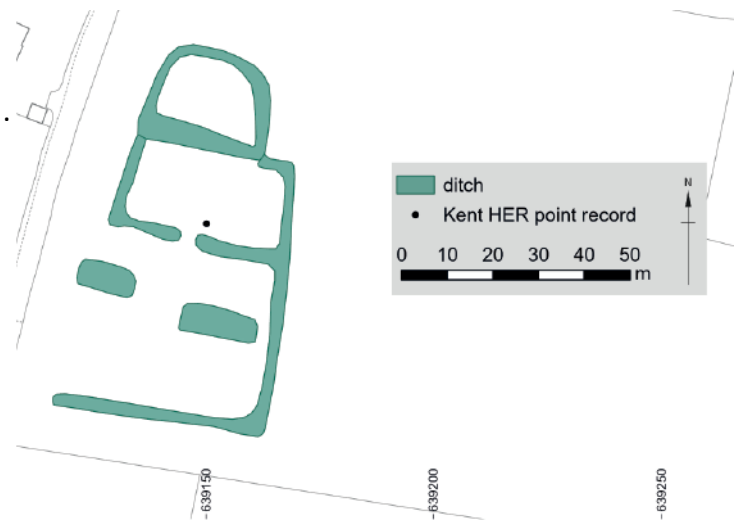
Aerial photographs and Lidar data processing

Alongside our work, Historic England's Aerial Investigation and Mapping Team has begun to identify, map and record archaeological features from aerial photographs and visualisations of lidar data across Thanet. They have begun their work in east Thanet, where the specialist team are currently examining aerial photographs covering Margate, Broadstairs and Ramsgate. The archaeological remains mapped as part of the project so far include extensive passive and active Second World War defences and training areas both on the coast and inland, as well as later prehistoric and Medieval features that show as cropmarks. Second World War sites are being mapped from historical aerial photographs taken during and immediately after the conflict. This allows us to record features that were quickly demolished or removed and now leave little trace.

An example of how an existing HER record can be enhanced is depicted on the right, showing a cropmark site at Reading Street. Currently, the HER monument record uses a point to mark the location of these enclosures. This is because the record was created 30 years ago when mapping cropmarks with accuracy was much more difficult. The new mapping accurately records the enclosures' location and shape and, by comparing them with similar excavated features elsewhere, we can suggest that this is a Medieval site that had at least two buildings inside one of the enclosures. The team will be progressing onto the western part of Thanet in stages.

Recent archaeological work carried out in the district.

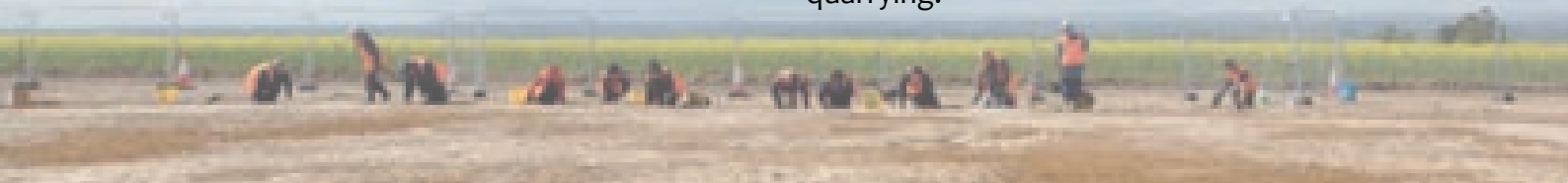
Archaeologists have been busy in Thanet over the winter months with several major excavations having taken place before development works. In Nash Road, Margate archaeologists from Pre-Construct Archaeology have been investigating an area of the Medieval landscape associated with Salmestone Grange, a Scheduled Monument. Discoveries include a series of road-side enclosures and sunken buildings, trackways and fields that would likely have been farmed from the monastic grange. .



Top: 1990 Aerial photograph of cropmark

Bottom: Historic England AIM team's interpretation and depiction of the cropmark

North of Minster, investigations also by Pre-Construct Archaeology have revealed traces of a Roman settlement, again with sunken buildings alongside the former main road through Thanet, Roman Dunstrete. The route of the Roman road is itself being preserved and interpreted within the future development there. Other discoveries on the site have included areas of Iron Age settlement, a Bronze Age ring ditch and Medieval enclosures and quarrying.





Large scale investigations have continued around Manston Road, Ramsgate as part of the Manston Green development. Here the Canterbury Archaeological Trust have been investigating extensive multi-period sites across a rich archaeological landscape. The recent investigations are adding to a picture of numerous trackways dating from the Bronze Age, Iron Age and Roman times crossing the area with associated trackside settlements, enclosures and field systems. Bringing together the mapping of the present work, with that of the previous investigations around Manston Road and crop mark evidence has, helped the archaeologists as they can now assess the discoveries in their landscape context. Sunken feature buildings have again featured in the discoveries at Manston Road including a cluster within a shallow valley that may be of Iron Age date, a rare finding, Roman and Saxon date. Later discoveries have included the remains of a Medieval windmill and a Second World War pillbox and trenching.

Although these are just a selection of recent discoveries from Thanet, they show that sunken feature buildings are particularly characteristic of the area, and for a longer span of history than is found elsewhere.



Top left: Shallow valley close to Ozengell Grange with the remains of Prehistoric Sunken Feature Buildings.
Bottom left: Iron Age ring ditches and round houses.
Top right: The supporting beam slots of a Medieval Windmill
Bottom right: Terminal end of a round house gully containing quern fragment. Images from CAT Manston Road site

How to Get Involved

As the project continues, we would very much like to talk to interested people and groups about what we are doing. We know that many people in Thanet will have information that we lack, and we want to find out what you know. Similarly, we want to tell as many people as we can about what we are doing.

If you and/or your organisation or society would like to host a public talk about the project, or if you would like more information, please get in touch via Victoria.hosegood@kent.gov.uk or heritage.conservation@kent.gov.uk



Historic England

